

NETWORK NEWS



DELIVERING TECHNOLOGY ACCESS TO AMERICA'S COMMUNITIES



Technical Assistance: One Size Does Not Fit All

Ask five people what the term *technical assistance* means to them, and chances are, you will get five different definitions. A Google™ search using the term *define technical assistance* identifies a page containing 13 different definitions from organizations and institutions around the country. Why is it so difficult to find a standard definition for the term technical assistance? Because when it comes to defining *technical assistance*, there is nothing standard about it.

To be effective, a technical assistance program must be customized to give users the information they need—in the way they want to receive it. But identifying what is needed and how it should be delivered is only half of the solution. Once user-specific tactics are identified, Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators with the necessary expertise and ability to adjust to change must use these tactics to achieve their goal of successfully helping the user.

The Neighborhood Networks Initiative offers technical assistance to help HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators and center directors adopt and successfully implement strategies that promote self-sufficiency and help to provide computer access to low-income multifamily housing communities. The program uses tailored tactics implemented by skilled TA Coordinators to achieve effective results.

Support for HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators

To help HUD's volunteer Neighborhood Networks Coordinators juggle multiple tasks, TA Coordinators maintain open lines of communication and serve as the HUD Coordinators' eyes and ears with centers. Continuous monitoring of center activities enables TA Coordinators to facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices. TA Coordinators conduct quarterly regional conference calls to provide information on the operation, maintenance, and creation of centers and to determine future needs. TA Coordinators also provide onsite technical assistance.

Helping Centers Help the Community

With more than 1,100 Neighborhood Networks centers, providing technical assistance to centers requires a comprehensive (continued on page 2)

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approach—one that offers remote and onsite support.

To develop center staff and offer them exposure to the larger Neighborhood Networks community, Neighborhood Networks offers remote technical assistance that includes:

- **Neighborhood Networks Information Center.** A toll-free information line is staffed from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Trained specialists draw on their experience to respond to a wide range of inquiries and fulfill publication requests, which can also be requested via the Neighborhood Networks Web site, e-mail, or fax.
- **Monthly conference calls.** Interactive monthly conference calls provide subject-matter expertise to Neighborhood Networks centers. The calls enable centers to learn how other centers have addressed problems, hear about different techniques for conducting resident outreach and providing them with needed services, and become familiar with emerging issues.
- **Weekly updates.** Opportunities for partnerships, funding, workforce development, educational opportunities, and other resources are posted weekly to the Neighborhood Networks Web site, and e-mailed, faxed, and mailed to centers.
- **New center outreach.** Neighborhood Networks builds brand awareness and informs center directors and property owners/managers of the benefits of participating in events and services

through Welcome-to-the-Neighborhood calls. Information about available services, resources, and products are provided to newly opened centers. Followup activities include mailing a new center information packet and contacting the center within 6 months of its opening to assess progress.

Neighborhood Networks also offers onsite technical assistance to provide a deeper level of support. To receive onsite technical assistance, HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators, centers, and property owners/managers either **nominate** centers or request to receive onsite technical assistance. If the center is selected, a TA Coordinator reviews the center's current business plan and other documents and completes an **initial assessment**. The TA Coordinator then conducts telephone interviews with the HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, center director, and property owner/manager to identify strengths that can be leveraged, weaknesses that can be eliminated, opportunities that should be acted upon, and threats that can be diminished—a technique known as a **SWOT analysis**. The TA Coordinator then schedules a 3- to 5-day

initial onsite visit that includes the development of a preliminary and a final action plan. To measure progress, rejuvenate the commitment of stakeholders, monitor the implementation of local partnerships, and provide additional assistance with action plan implementation, a **follow-up site visit** is conducted within 2 to 6 months of the initial site visit. TA Coordinators write a followup report that evaluates the center's progress, summarizes followup visit activities, and offers additional recommendations. Following the site visits, the TA Coordinator maintains communication to ensure the successful implementation of the action plan.

A Powerful Solution

Neighborhood Networks' technical assistance program is a valuable resource that HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators and centers rely on to help them fulfill the mission of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. By using knowledgeable TA Coordinators to carry out a range of activities via a variety of channels, Neighborhood Networks is promoting self-sufficiency and delivering technology access to America's communities. ■

NETWORKNEWS

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Technical Assistance? Just Say Yes!

Neighborhood Networks Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators are adept at helping center directors and property managers develop and implement strategies that improve center services and strengthen program development. Just ask Susan Edwards, center director for the Smith-Keys Computer Learning Center (CLC), and Steve Reemts, owner of the Humboldt Apartments, which houses the Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center. They both participated in the technical assistance process and laud its impact on their centers' development.

Smith-Keys Computer Learning Center Texarkana, Arkansas

"TA is a Godsend. Don't wait! Do it now!" That's Edwards' advice to other Neighborhood Networks center directors regarding technical assistance. And she should know. Her center received technical assistance in 2005.

"When the TA Coordinator visited our center in March, I was very impressed with his scope of knowledge about his job and the Texarkana area, his attention to detail, the data he brought with him, his strong interpersonal skills, and his professionalism," says Edwards. "He had an agenda, and he stayed with it."

Making a Difference

In consultation with Edwards and property manager Marietta Works, the TA Coordinator developed an action plan to increase center

sustainability and promote self-sufficiency.

The TA Coordinator introduced Edwards to the Strategic Tracking and Reporting Tool (START), demonstrating its usage and highlighting its benefits. He then encouraged her and center staff to develop a mission statement, objectives, and goals for the center, and to enter this data along with asset information into START.

The TA Coordinator, Edwards, and Works also conducted a thorough asset mapping and created a list of potential partners, including local businesses and government, community, and health organizations. The Coordinator suggested initiating partnership meetings with these organizations, beginning with the Texarkana Workforce Center, an area One-Stop service provider, where both Edwards and Works had active contacts. He then communicated with representatives from the Arkansas Employment Security Department/Texarkana Workforce Center and Workforce Investment Act programs. After visiting the center, the representatives were very interested in potential partnership opportunities. Both organizations are now center partners.

"The TA Coordinator also suggested ways for us to track outcomes and suggested activities, such as computer classes and job searches, to attract residents and other underserved members of the community to the center," says Edwards.



Promoting the center was another suggestion offered by the TA Coordinator. Edwards created separate center brochures for residents and for attracting community partners. She also had great success promoting the center through local media outlets.

"I appeared on a local talk show to educate the public about our center and its services and also to invite them to our Neighborhood Networks Week open house," says Edwards. "We also had several articles written about us in the local newspaper—the *Texarkana Gazette*—to let people know where we are located."

After the initial site visit in March, a followup visit was conducted in July to monitor the center's progress with its new programs and partners. The TA Coordinator continues to communicate with Edwards regularly by telephone and e-mail.

"His recommendations and expertise have been a most valuable asset," says Edwards. "We are now members of the Community Builders of Arkansas, Inc., Neighborhood

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Help Yourself to Technical Assistance

Neighborhood Networks centers need ongoing technical assistance to enhance their service offerings and strengthen their organizational capacity. Technical assistance provides expertise, recommendations, materials, and referrals to help centers find partners or develop new programs. Neighborhood Networks supplies centers with many technical assistance resources—from its toll-free information center to monthly conference calls.

Equally important, Neighborhood Networks centers can access local resources on their own. By using the Yellow Pages and the Internet, centers will find a variety of public and private organizations that can provide information and resources to enhance center programs.

Let Your Fingers Do the Walking to Prospective Partners

Many public and private organizations can help centers identify prospective partners, such as:

- **Local and state governments.** City, county, and state government Web sites and the Yellow Pages provide contact information for local agencies that deal with public schools, childcare, employment, community action, program planning, cooperative extension, adult education, recreation, aging, social services, and health. Local elected officials' offices can also identify prospective public and private partners located in the center's surrounding community.
- **Local colleges and universities.** From computer classes to volunteers, higher education institutions have many resources that centers can access. Web sites and the Yellow Pages provide easy access to schools in your area. Many colleges, such as those with grants from HUD's Office of University Partnerships (www.oup.org), are committed to working with community organizations, including Neighborhood Networks centers.
- **Chambers of Commerce.** The Chamber provides an entry into the local business community and potential partnerships that can generate employment and training opportunities for residents, center volunteers, and funding.
- **Public libraries.** Reference librarians and community directories and databases are valuable sources to identify prospective partners. Call or visit your local library or access the library's Web site.
- **Nonprofit organizations and churches.** The Yellow Pages typically list social service organizations and churches that provide services and resources that many Neighborhood Networks centers are seeking. For example, youth organizations (the YMCA, YWCA, and Boys and Girls Clubs), social services agencies for recent immigrants, Catholic Charities, Associated Jewish Charities, Lutheran Services, and domestic violence centers are nonprofit service providers in many communities.

Expand Workforce Development

Linking residents to workforce development is a central goal of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative. Many local resources are available to help centers build effective employment programs, including:

- **One-Stop centers.** The Department of Labor's (DOL's) nationwide network of One-Stop centers consolidates access to jobs and employment services under one roof. Resources include career counseling, job search and placement assistance, labor market information, unemployment insurance, supportive services such as transportation and daycare, and general equivalency diploma (GED) programs. As part of their Neighborhood Networks national partnership, HUD and DOL have developed an Internet link (www.servicelocator.org/partners/DataEntry.asp?) that will take Neighborhood Networks center users directly to a personalized One-Stop career Web site with information on the closest One-Stop center, including public transportation availability, hours of operation, and the resources available at the One-Stop.
- **Public schools, colleges, and universities.** Local high schools and higher education institutions offer a variety of employment readiness and career programs, work-study programs, literacy classes, GED, English as a

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Give Them What They Want—And Need

To better understand the resources that are needed to fulfill the mission of the Neighborhood Networks Initiative, Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinators maintain constant communication with HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators and center directors. By identifying areas that offer growth as well as current challenges, TA Coordinators are able to create an arsenal of technical assistance tools designed specifically to meet center user needs.

While the list of technical assistance categories is continuously changing to meet the varying needs of residents, core areas of technical assistance include:

- **Partnership Development and Maintenance.**
- **Workforce Development or Expansion.**
- **Tracking and Evaluation of Performance.**
- **START Business Plan Development.**
- **501(c)(3) Tax-Exempt Application.**
- **Outreach to Residents.**
- **Outreach to Stakeholders.**
- **Health Resources.**
- **Microenterprise Development.**
- **Grantwriting.**

Technical Assistance? Just Say Yes! (continued from page 3)

Networks Consortium. We will definitely seek technical assistance in the future.”

Steve Reemts, Owner Humboldt Apartments Denver, Colorado

“I was so impressed with the TA Coordinator’s expertise, professionalism, and realistic approach.” That’s how Steve Reemts, property owner of the Humboldt Apartments that houses the Sister Mary Lucy Neighborhood Networks Center, describes his experience with technical assistance staff. In 2003, the center received onsite technical assistance resulting in the development of a detailed action plan that, according to Reemts, took the center to the next level.

The TA Coordinator’s initial visit to the center was preceded by several months of planning to develop an agenda based on center needs. “This preparation included communicating with current partners, securing appointments with potential partners, and creating needs-assessment surveys for current and potential computer lab users,” says Reemts. “So when the TA Coordinator arrived on site, our agenda and goals were established.”


The onsite visit produced a detailed analysis of the center’s current situation and several recommendations for attaining sustainability and growth. Current partnerships were strengthened, new partnerships were established, and partner roles were

identified. A plan for program development and activities was developed based on resident feedback from the surveys. Marketing and promotional pieces were critiqued and suggestions were made for more community-focused and attractive brochures. Also, plans were made for creating a user-friendly center Web site.

Positive Outcomes

Since that initial visit, center usage has doubled and the center’s schedule is full of activities designed to meet the needs of the residents. In addition, the center now offers English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and conversational English classes, homework assistance, workshops on how to deal with lead in homes, and monthly health seminars led by health professionals. The center has also added staff to meet the demands of the center residents.

“I am grateful for the support and hands-on guidance of our TA Coordinator, who didn’t just come, make recommendations, and then leave,” says Reemts. “There was a followup onsite visit 6 months after the initial visit, and followup remote technical assistance via telephone and e-mail, offering continued support and guidance in achieving our established goals. We maintain an ongoing relationship with our TA Coordinator and know they are only a phone call away when we need them.”

To speak with a Neighborhood Networks TA Coordinator and/or request technical assistance, call toll-free (888) 312-2743. 

Technical Assistance: Coming to a Center Near You

Across the country, Neighborhood Networks centers are seeking technical assistance to build their capacity, operate more efficiently, measure performance, establish vital partnerships, and create programs that lead to employment and self-sufficiency for residents.

Aloha Park Neighborhood Networks Center, Oregon

Increased capacity to deliver services to its residents was the result of the Aloha Park Neighborhood Networks Center's request for technical assistance. Through an Intel grant, the center received new computers to support its newly developed, bilingual onsite workforce development program, which was established through a formal partnership with the Oregon Employment Department. Multilingual volunteers administered a door-to-door resident survey to determine residents' needs and interests. Tualatin Valley Housing Partners, which owns the Aloha Park complex, secured four grants to enhance center programs and update computer equipment at the center.

Arastradero Park Computer Learning Center, California

Technical assistance has helped the Arastradero Park Computer Learning Center in Palo Alto enhance programs and services and develop new tools necessary for the center's continued growth. The Technical Assistance (TA) Coordinator helped the center to formalize partnerships with Opportunities Industrialization Center West to offer residents referrals for job-skills training, and the Lucille

Packard Children's Hospital to provide health education classes for children and adults. Technical assistance provided tools that enable the center to track resident participation and evaluate program effectiveness.

Broadwater Village Neighborhood Networks Center, Montana

In Helena, the Broadwater Village Neighborhood Networks Center received assistance with collecting demographic data and conducting a resident survey. This helped center stakeholders to better understand the center's target audience, including the residents' technical, educational, and workforce needs, and determine how the center can help to meet those needs. Through a national Neighborhood Networks partnership with Per Scholas, the center received new computer hardware. A local partnership with the Salvation Army will provide life-skills workshops and computer literacy classes for residents.

Family Learning Center, Colorado

As a result of technical assistance, the Family Learning Center in Boulder now has a solid base of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and computer classes in Spanish. Focusing on outreach to residents—the majority of whom are Latino—the TA Coordinator worked with center staff to conduct a resident survey and develop partnerships to meet residents' needs. As a result of the survey, many classes are now offered at night and on weekends, allowing

residents to access valuable employment skills.

Magic Johnson/HP Inventor Center at Hilltop Village, Florida

With the assistance of a TA Coordinator, the Magic Johnson/HP Inventor Center at Hilltop Village in Jacksonville has successfully improved adult resident participation by developing marketing strategies and outreach tools. The center staff expanded the center's previous workforce development program to include general equivalency diploma (GED), adult literacy, and workforce training. The addition of these classes has created adult programming and increased adult participation from 4 to 30 residents. By expanding and establishing programs that target adults, the center is meeting residents' needs and forming partnerships with organizations that can provide resources to help meet those needs.

Kukui Tower Computer Learning Center, Hawaii

To meet the needs of its diverse residents, the Kukui Tower Computer Learning Center in Honolulu hired bilingual staff and, with the assistance of the TA Coordinator, conducted a door-to-door resident survey. The TA Coordinator also worked with the center to establish a relationship between the center and the Child and Family Service to provide a basic workforce skills program. Another partner—Arts in Mark's Garage—secured a grant to provide music and art education

classes that will give residents priority to attend.

Pedestal Gardens Neighborhood Networks Computer Learning Center, Maryland

As a result of technical assistance, residents and center staff of Pedestal Gardens Neighborhood Networks Computer Learning Center in Baltimore are working together to support afterschool programs and improve security in the community. Attendance at resident meetings is increasing, with an average of 25 residents at each meeting. The center recently introduced individual development accounts (IDAs) to residents and implemented financial literacy programs. Technical assistance focused on increasing team building and interpersonal skills among center staff, and provided staff members with expanded opportunities to participate in professional development activities through a new partnership with Business Volunteers Unlimited.

Helping Residents and Centers Move Forward

From coast to coast, TA Coordinators are helping Neighborhood Networks centers expand their programs and services, develop and maintain community partnerships, promote staff development, and develop the tools necessary to track and evaluate the success of programs and residents. These efforts are enhancing center sustainability and enabling centers to continue to offer the programs and services that residents of HUD insured and assisted housing need to help them move toward self-sufficiency.

Help Yourself to Technical Assistance (continued from page 4)

Second Language (ESL), and career counseling. Centers can contact area schools to explore possible partnerships to provide onsite and campus-based programs.

- **Private nonprofit organizations.** Local branches of national organizations, such as Goodwill, operate employment and training programs.

Access Health Resources

To identify area health resources for new programs and partnerships, contact:


- **Local and state health departments.** Contact the local department to discover available services that match residents' needs. From onsite clinics to health education programs, explore the opportunities for health and mental health services for residents of all ages.
- **Hospitals and schools of medicine, public health, nursing, and pharmacy.** Centers located near these institutions can investigate resources and partnership options, including onsite health programs and employment opportunities for residents.

Pursue Peer-to-Peer Technical Assistance

Where have other centers in your state found effective workforce programs? Has a nearby college provided skilled computer teachers or afterschool tutors? Are any businesses interested in donating surplus computers? Ask other center directors about local resources and

partners that they have found helpful. Other methods of engaging fellow Neighborhood Networks stakeholders include:

- **HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators** can help link a center seeking resources with other centers that have dealt with similar situations.
- **Neighborhood Networks consortia** and the newly formed Neighborhood Networks National Consortium bring area centers together to share information and peer-to-peer technical assistance.
- **Monthly conference calls** and national conferences give center directors regular opportunities to ask questions and find resources and solutions to enhance their centers.
- **The Neighborhood Networks Web site** (www.NeighborhoodNetworks.org) provides numerous online resources, including technical assistance guides and databases of centers and HUD Neighborhood Networks Coordinators in every state.
- **Neighborhood Networks centers** can also contact the Neighborhood Networks Information Center toll free at (888) 312-2743 (TTY: (800) 483-2209) or e-mail: mail@neighborhoodnetworks.org.

Help yourself to technical assistance. Start by identifying residents' needs and interests. Then explore area resources and groups to contact and begin building new partnerships. 

2006 Calendar of Events

Conference Calls

April 18—*Street Smarts: Laying Out a Path for Community Outreach*

May 16—*Who's Who on Your Board: Identifying and Developing a Board of Directors for Your Neighborhood Networks Center*

June 20—*Guess Who's Coming to Your Center? Event Planning at Your Neighborhood Networks Center*

July 25—*Making it Work! Developing Your Center's Workforce Development Program*

August 15—*Building and Mending Relationship Bridges: Conflict Resolution for Center Staff and the Community*

September 19—*Heard Any Good Stories Lately? Neighborhood Networks Success Stories*

Consortia Conference Calls

June 6—*Innovative Technology*

September 12—*Basics in Consortia Board Development*

RTAWs

April 5–7—*Regional Technical Assistance Workshop, San Diego, California*

June 21–23—*Regional Technical Assistance Workshop, Boston, Massachusetts*

Neighborhood Networks Week

July 31 to August 5, 2006

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